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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to help educators, particularly in nursing, understand the attitudes, feelings, and perspectives that students from other cultures bring to the teacher-learner situation, this paper identifies some generalized behavioral characteristics of different cultures and the educational problems that may arise when cultural differences are combined with learning skill deficiencies. Being intelligent, industrious, neat, polite, quiet, and respectful, the Asian Americans appear to be model students. But, coming from a nonverbal culture, their interpersonal and verbal skills need development. Though individualism is emphasized, Spanish American and native American children are taught to value cooperation and the family; they exhibit a noncompetitive trait that is often in conflict with the American pursuit of success. While black children are adept verbal performers, they often remain deficient in reading and writing skills. These skills need improvement for them to be successful college students. It is concluded that the faculty can help students of diverse backgrounds to cope more effectively so that their educational experience will be more successful, offer more satisfaction, and society will receive better nursing care. (Author/JK)

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Diversity: Cultural and Educational Implications for Nursing Educators and the Nontraditional Student.

by

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and
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FOREWORD

The Faculty Development in Nursing Education project, a three-year federally funded activity sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board, held its first regional conference in Atlanta, Georgia -- October 16-18, 1977. The theme of this conference -- Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness -- highlighted the over-all goal of the project, i.e., to assist faculty, particularly in nursing, to cope more effectively with the needs of students of diverse backgrounds. The term diverse is used to refer to those cultural and educational differences manifest in student populations.

The keynote address of this conference, coauthored by Dr. Sylvia Hart, Dean and Ms. Kathleen Conlon, Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, University of Tennessee in Knoxville, set the stage for examining cultural and educational differences and those relevant implications for nursing educators. The project staff is pleased to share the paper presented by Sylvia Hart on October 16, 1977.

DIVERSITY: CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL

Cultural differences have enriched all our lives and contributed to our American way of life. One of the joys of traveling to various regions in this country is the variety in food, music, art, and architecture that one finds. The South, rich in hospitality, country music, regional dialects and Southern cooking, is a delight to tourists. New Orleans has a unique blend of French, black, and Indian cultures that is distinctive and unforgettable. The Spanish and Indian influence on the art, architecture, and food of the Southwest is easily recognized as part of that region's history. These wide differences result from the cultural input of the local residents.

The rich cultural diversity that this country offers should be valued for more than just the pleasure it gives the traveler. These many and diverse cultures have contributed different perspectives of the world situation and are a rich source for developing strategies and alternatives as we attempt to deal with common problems. Unfortunately, sometimes this diversity is viewed as a problem rather than as a resource for solving problems and perhaps an examination of its history and characteristics will help us to understand and utilize it.

During the past century, America, which had been rural, has changed to a pattern of urban living. Associated with this change are the modifications seen in family and community life. Institutional arrangements within the

community have been created to solve the newly created problems of urban life. Reflected in this solution is the increase in organizational complexity, which has increased the need for cooperation among urban dwellers. As efforts toward political, social, and economic integration in the urban centers have increased, contact between individuals with varying cultural backgrounds has pointed up the substantial difficulties of working together effectively. Frequently, even though persons from different cultures are working and living in close physical proximity, they are not really working and living together. They are not using the diversity that surrounds them, hence, true integration is not taking place. The behaviors of persons from other cultures remain misunderstood and unacceptable.

The ability to correctly infer the meaning of specific behaviors of an individual from another culture is essential when dealing with intracultural situations. Failure to understand this meaning can have a devastating effect on the relationship between individuals. A good illustration of this comes from a report of Vassilion, a Greek psychiatrist. To understand the dialogue that follows, it is helpful to know that the Greeks see supervisory positions as more authoritarian and "bossy" than do Americans who prefer participatory and democratic procedures.

STATEMENT OR BEHAVIOR		CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF BEHAVIOR	
American:	How long will it take you to finish this report?	American:	I asked him to participate.
		Greek:	His behavior makes no sense. He is the boss. Why doesn't he tell me?
Greek:	I don't know. How long should it take?	American:	He refuses to take responsibility.
		Greek:	I asked him for an order.
American:	You are in the best position to analyze time requirements.	American:	I press him to take responsibility for his own actions.
		Greek:	What nonsense! I better give him an answer.
Greek:	10 days	American:	He lacks the ability to estimate time. This time estimate is totally inadequate. It will take at least 30 days.
American:	Take 15. Is it agreed you will do it in 15 days?	American:	I offer a contract.
		Greek:	These are my orders: 15 days.
Greek:	Yes		

The report did require 30 days of work. Consequently, the Greek worked day and night, but at the end of the 15th day, he still needed one more day's work to finish the report.

STATEMENT OR BEHAVIOR		CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF BEHAVIOR	
American:	Where is the report?	American:	I am making sure he fulfills his contract.
		Greek:	He is asking for the report.
Greek:	It will be ready tomorrow.	(Both understand that the report is not ready.)	
American:	But we had agreed it would be ready today.	American:	I must teach him to fulfill a contract.
		Greek:	The stupid, incompetent fool! not only did he give me the wrong orders, but he does not even appreciate that I did a 30-day job in 16 days.

The Greek hands in his resignation. The American is surprised. The Greek feels that he cannot work for such a man; he expects authority figures to speak with authority. Therefore, when a supervisor tries to involve his employees in the decision making process, the Greek employee loses respect for his supervisor and becomes confused and dissatisfied.

This dialogue underlines the fact that, within a given culture, behavior is predictable. When individuals move out of their own culture, they are unable to predict how members of this alien culture will behave. Guthrie in his article, "A Behavioral Analysis of Culture Learning," describes the difficulties encountered by many Americans who have worked and lived in other countries. Most of the observations reported were based on anecdotal reports by Peace Corps workers. If we apply these insights to students who have different cultural backgrounds and enter nursing, we would realize that their difficulties are similar to those experienced by foreigners living in another culture. The foreigner and student are asked to learn many new things and to deny behaviors that may be old and familiar responses to common situations. The first clinical experience for any nursing student is filled with anxiety as the student attempts to identify appropriate behaviors. For example, how do you walk into a total stranger's bedroom, ask prying questions, and share intimate details of bodily function? While this is a confusing and anxiety-producing situation for all nursing students it can be emotionally shattering to those who have also lost their identity and the comfort of familiar social situations.

What many of these students are experiencing is culture shock which is usually accompanied by increased irritability, impatience, loss of appetite, poor sleeping habits and somatic symptoms. For a while people are willing to stay in a situation like this, even if satisfaction is absent but, with increasing dissatisfaction, the desire to leave increases. This may explain why some of our nursing students drop out. The combination of the academic challenge and the burden of acculturation is more than they can handle.

Thoughtful preparation for these initial academic and clinical experiences may help to support performance during this period. Because familiar cues and the subtle, unspoken conventions of behavior with which they are familiar are changed, the satisfaction in the experience may not be there. The social events that provide encouragement, direction, and meaning no longer support behavior and the student may become frightened, disoriented, discouraged, or angry.

If students can retain familiar supports, they can continue to live and feel as they always have. But, if the new culture is very different, some students may limit their contact, concentrating on the job (course), while withdrawing from all but essential contact. However, if students can achieve competence in the new culture, they may move toward the people in the new experience and the insights that this knowledge can provide. The foreigner or student may encounter disapproval for unknown reasons and familiar strategies that used to please others no longer work. It is one thing to recognize that values differ, but students, like all people, cannot

get along without approval; without approval and encouragement, alienation and identity crisis result. If it becomes necessary to change behavior patterns that are not congruent with the other culture, students may feel dishonest and insincere. They may feel that they are losing their personal values and they may question the price they must pay for the experience.

Some students may become acutely self-conscious as a result of their continual vigilance in trying to reduce the possibility of errors in their behavior. In these cases students may lose their spontaneity.

In any situation where one individual is different from everyone else, that individual tends to view himself or herself more closely and critically than before. This produces anxiety. Without familiar models to calm the uncertainties, the individual begins to wonder what kind of person he or she is. This experience can provide insight and an awareness of limitations, but it takes a determined individual to persevere until the situation becomes more predictable and a new world is opened and understood.

As educators we need to understand the attitudes, feelings, and perspectives that students from other cultures bring to the teaching-learning situation. We need to appreciate and maintain the cultural uniqueness of students while providing the necessary education and skills to enable them to function and contribute. Since culture orders experience and guides behavior, we must be aware of these implications for learning.

Since it is well established that attitudes and behaviors are formed early in life, we need to examine the variations in child rearing that

different cultures take in socializing their children. All social classes and ethnic groups provide child care that shapes the child's responses to and perceptions of the environment. These child-rearing routines are subtle, but persistent in developing emotional expression, skill in interpersonal relationships, and development of value systems, life patterns and habits. If we understand how different cultures rear their children we will also understand the behaviors they present to us when we see them as college students. Some of the following generalizations may be helpful in correctly interpreting the behaviors of students from various cultures.

Asian-American students are intelligent, industrious, neat, polite, quiet, and respectful. They appear to be the teacher's model student. Coming from a culture that is non-verbal, the Asian-American student appears passive when compared with the active, spontaneous, and self-directed American norm. Seldom will the Asian-American student venture to answer questions asked of a group. To elicit a response from these shy students, it is necessary to direct the questions specifically to the student.

In their traditional culture, the Asian-American child experiences negative, not positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is not given upon achievement as good performance is expected, but if poor performance occurs, the child feels shame. This contributes to a lack of confidence in the Asian-American student. Moreover, overt displays of emotion are discouraged. This inhibits the student further and reinforces the image of the Asian-American student as passive and inscrutable.

The result of this is that Japanese and Chinese Americans who have the

highest educational equivalency of any group in the United States, realize no parity between their education, their occupation and the income they receive. In other words, they expect and receive few rewards for becoming well educated -- the American society rewards those who are assertive, confident and highly verbal.

It is not surprising then that studies have determined that the majority of American-born Japanese and Chinese males enter fields where information is highly structured and requires little self-expression, such as engineering and the sciences. Other studies have revealed that these students are less independent, more inhibited and conforming. With weak interpersonal skills, these graduates are especially subjected to loneliness since they do not enter the mainstream of society.

To more fully equip the Asian-American student to bridge the two cultures, interpersonal skills must be strengthened and verbal skills must be developed more fully. Small discussion groups will permit these students to contribute more, thereby developing self-confidence in their abilities and enabling them to enter the competitive job markets and achieve the distinction that their academic achievement merits.

Spanish-American children, on the other hand, learn early how to function in society. Daily courtesies and politeness are developed in the family group and among friends. Later this quite naturally extends to their superiors and peers and the child is quite comfortable with the social amenities in the adult world.

This quality is combined with a sense of self-worth. Spanish children

are encouraged to be self-reliant and to think and speak for themselves. This individualism acknowledges the dignity and integrity of both child and adult. Praise and admiration are freely given for individual accomplishments and this contributes to the sense of confidence exhibited by children with a Spanish heritage.

Despite this emphasis on individualism, children are taught to value cooperation. Their society is non-competitive and within the large, extended families, the children are taught to value loyalty, especially to the family. The kinship ties and cooperative spirit make the family the focus for social activities. Success is not seen as excelling or being better than others, but on being a more complete person. The emphasis is not on what the individual will "do" in life, but what he or she will "be" in life. This focus on the development of the human spirit leads many of these students to prefer the study of humanities and the arts rather than the physical sciences.

The tragedy of this humane approach to life occurs when the Spanish-American standards meet the United States standards. The phenomenon called "cocolonization" occurs, which implies dominance of the U.S. values as indicated by a consumer approach to success and the pursuit of material goods. That loss is our loss also when the Spanish student converts the values held at home to those of the dominant U.S. society.

Another group that exhibits this non-competitive trait is the native American Indian. A typical example was found in a Canadian newspaper that reported the remarks of a ski coach trying to train Indians to compete in races. He said --

> "My biggest disappointment this season has been that Fred and Shirley aren't training as hard as I'd like them to. It's an interesting situation. Both are Indians and their custom is that no Indian likes to rise above the others. If one does, the others quietly cut him back down to their own size. So Shirley and Fred won't train. My biggest problem will be to motivate them to greater things. If an Indian is behind, he wants to catch up, but when he's ahead, he sort of waits for the rest."

Because Indians have non-materialistic goals and values, they easily share things. Their generosity is influenced by their values. Taught to live in harmony with man and nature, the Puritan ethic of hard work devoted to amassing land and possessions is not part of the Indian ethic. Land was not to be sold, just as you would not sell your mother. Charles Eastman, a Sioux Indian describes tribal code on poesssions:

> "It was our belief that love of posessions is a weakness to be overcome. Its appeal is to the material part and if allowed its way it will, in time, disturb the spiritual balance of the man. Therefore the child must learn the beauty of generosity. He is taught to give what he prizes most..."

The valued aspects of life consist of good interpersonal relationships and a positive relationship with nature and the Great Spirit. Because interpersonal relationships are so important, rejection of the Indian, be it from prejudice or personal failures,creates in the Indian a sense of inferiority. Usually frank, open, and direct, the Indian becomes silent if hurt or misunderstood. This often leads to the myth of the "silent Indian," but among themselves, Indians have respect not only for silence, but for words. Momaday describes the Indian's respect for words in <u>The Way to Rainy Mountain</u>, "A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning;

it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred." On silence, Charles Eastman writes in his book Indian Boyhood, "The power of articulate speech....is to him a perilous gift. He believes profoundly in silence -- the sigh of perfect equilibrium. Silence is the absolute poise or balance of body, mind, and spirit." With respect for both words and silence, eloquence is held in high esteem. Orators and storytellers are well respected and all Indians are afforded the opportunity to express themselves with the responsibility to speak from memory and to waste few words. This eloquence is further strengthened by the lack of a written language and the importance of an oral/aural history.

Traditionally, the Indian student is not competitive. There is little value seen by the Indian student in competing, since the student believes the basic goal of education is just to learn. Some recommendations for educators who may work with native American students and other non-competitive students include:

- Think carefully before giving high praise to a student in class. Light praise given in class in written form at the top of an assignment or test, or individually at the end of a class is a better method of handling positive reinforcement.

- As these students prefer not be be the focus of attention, avoid asking direct questions. Begin by asking students to answer from the group and then move to individuals.

- Do not schedule oral presentations until the students have become acquainted with each other. It is better to work in small groups if you would like to encourage student participation.

The Indian is generally not influenced by chronological time, which is in great contrast to the Anglo-American stress-producing time concept with deadlines for work, travel, daily living activities and play. This habit of remaining on "Indian time" is the despair of many people, including the almost acculturated Indian. The Indian student who remains unconcerned about a strict time schedule can create problems. It is helpful if initially the instructor can make loose schedules and short-term assignments in order to give the student time to learn to cope with the Anglo-American concept of time. Later, long-term assignments and precise deadlines can be handled by the Indian student.

Like the Indian, many black students do not operate on a strict time schedule and they further share the oral/aural tradition of history as Roots has so recently emphasized. There are inherent differences in the black and Indian cultures as a result of their different origins. The black values and traditions emerged from a combination of their African heritage and the experiences of blacks in this society. Those blacks most isolated from the mainstream in the United States, most distinctly retain these traditions. Black children are taught to be cooperative and supportive while in the work situation, but competitive and individualistic in their play. Play is the mechanism for expressing themselves and identifying and developing their individuality.

Perhaps because of their oral/aural tradition and their orientation to people and performance, the black American prizes the ability to verbalize. The black child speaks not only to communicate, but for the reaction and

approval of the audience. Listeners are expected to actively participate both verbally and non-verbally. Black children and adults combine their verbalizations with emotional and physical activities. Therefore, body language is an integral part of communication for black Americans.

While black children learn early to become adept verbal performers, studies at the college level indicate that these students quite often remain deficient in the basic, but essential, reading and writing skills. These skills, crucial to collegiate success, are not held in such high value. This lack of value for reading and writing combined with poor elementary and secondary education greatly reduces students' ability to express themselves on paper.

Some of the skills that need improvement in order to make it possible for these students to successfully perform at the collegiate level have been identified in a case study of a remedial program at Queens College of the City University of New York. Many of the black and Puerto Rican students enrolled in the Queens' SEEK program have read widely, but were unable to identify the basic thesis of a story or even a paragraph. Frequently students concentrated on small details and remained unsuccessful in identifying the substance of the author's idea. The necessity of taking notes during a lecture or from an article or book frustrated these students, as this skill is dependent upon the student's ability to distinguish the essential point from supplementary detail.

The SEEK students all experienced difficulty in organizing a paper. They tended to suggest a topic, but failed to develop it before introducing another

idea. The resulting disorganization offered little basis for developing such technical skills as paragraphing. Lack of other technical skills in sentence construction, such as subject-verb agreement, and sentence fragments were also present but grammatical principles are easier to correct.

It is the failure of the student to clearly present a specific idea, and logically develop his thesis, that hampers effective written expression most severely. The student's inability to identify a story's basic thesis carries over into an essay type exam. It is then that the student is required to analyze the question and determine the idea he/she wishes to present. The problem is compounded when the student attempts to organize an effective answer quickly. The resulting essay is almost guaranteed to be unorganized and chaotic, dooming the student to failure.

In the remedial program at Queens College, smaller classes for SEEK students allowed instructors to give individual attention in the two core courses all SEEK students were required to take. In both the English and Social Science courses, emphasis was placed on the development of essential reading and writing skills; students had to read and analyze fairly difficult subject matter. They were taught expository writing, and grammatical errors were identified in the student's papers. Discussion of examples taken directly from their papers, seemed to have more relevance for them and the impact had some carryover for the student. The basic principle was to teach material of good intellectual quality while developing basic skills. Sophisticated material was chosen, the article, essay or story was analyzed in class, and the basic idea identified. From this discussion an outline for a paper was

developed which the student then used to write the paper outside of class. Lectures on the subject were given by the most competent instructors and students were required to take notes. Paragraph outlines and underlining of significant points were used to assist the student in analyzing materials used for exams.

The problem of improving reading comprehension is always a difficult one. Specific approaches to solving this problem were developed by the instructors in the SEEK program at Queens College. The work was reported to be tedious and the recommendation was made that only short blocks of time be devoted to these exercises. The exercises involved picking out topic sentences from paragraphs and identifying the relationship between the topic sentence and the other sentences in the paragraph. The other sentences might clarify, magnify, contrast, or restate the topic sentence. Key words and phrases that were repeated were identified, as were the various ways used to express the same idea. Transitional words and logical construction were discussed. The exercises seemed to improve reading comprehension with a carryover into the student's writing and note taking.

The necessity for improving reading comprehension is accentuated by the conclusions drawn from a study comparing the relationship between reading comprehension and student performance on the National Teachers Examination. Thirteen variables were compared and a strong relationship was found between a student's reading ability and his/her score on the exam. There was a significant relationship between reading ability and GPA. The weakest relationships found were those between race and the other variables. The

conclusions based on the study were that:

- Student performance on the NTE was related to reading abilities in vocabulary, comprehension, and speed of comprehension.
- Many students preparing to become elementary teachers were not themselves competent readers.
- Many college students who were judged in terms of their test scores as being comparatively poor readers could attain cumulative GPA's and course grades of 2.0 (C=2.0) or higher.

For those students in health science fields, including nursing, the ability to read with comprehension is indispensable. In a study done at Hostas Community College (CUNY), the difficulty level of current textbooks was analyzed and compared with the entry vocabulary of the open enrollment students, which was at about the ninth grade level. The textbooks and journals were analyzed to identify the readability of the total book or article and the range of grade level for each book or article.

It was found that the reading level of college textbooks averaged at the 14th grade although variation within and between chapters was as much as five grade levels (grades 11 - 16). The criteria used to evaluate readability included syntax, sentence length, and compound concepts, but vocabulary level was the variable of greatest consequence. Sparks and Gizis concluded that the minimum level of skill needed to read and understand college texts was tenth grade.

Low vocabulary level and verbal skills are most frequently found in students for whom English is not the primary language. This has implications for the Spanish and Indian student who is bilingual. The black student who

is deficient in vocabulary and reading comprehension for the reasons previously cited is also highly vulnerable to academic failure unless these deficiencies are corrected.

Unless we have assessed the vocabulary and ideas our students have mastered and use them as a basis to introduce new ideas, we have no way of knowing whether we are communicating with them. In English, scientists use a vocabulary of great precision. Consequently it is very helpful to students in a particular field to improve their vocabulary and reading skills by doing most of their reading in that subject matter. This approach overcomes several deficiencies with the same exercise and because the student is interested in the subject, he or she will be motivated to read more extensively.

The English language is causality oriented. The middle class American child is imbued with this. If a middle class white American mother asks a child to pick up his roller skates from the stairs and the child asks "Why?" the mother will most likely reply by explaining cause and effect. "Because someone will come along, trip on your skates and fall down the stairs. You wouldn't want to be responsible for that,would you?" Built into this response is the middle class guilt syndrome. Guilt is an internal sanction on members of the American middle class. Other cultures and languages do not have this orientation.

In the instance cited above,a mother with a Chinese, Japanese, or black cultural heritage is more likely to appeal to authority or power and reply, "Because I told you to." Frequently associated with this is the control

exerted by shame, or the loss of respect of one's social group. Ridicule for these students is a more severe punishment than any other form. The response to a child who questions an order in these cultures is many times a statement that is emphasized and proved by quoting a proverb or maxim. For example, a response to a child who doesn't want to go to bed may be "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." It speaks indirectly to the concern, but makes an effective point. For the student acculturated in this way, he/she may find difficulty speaking directly to the point. It is then important to have the student clarify the point and clearly identify the concern.

A university education for the student from these cultures separates them from their home and society by producing an intellectually curious individual who questions the order of things. If too many questions are asked, the individual may no longer be considered a part of the original society. They may become emotionally separated from the formerly close ties with family and community. Since education is not simply preparation for a job, but should also improve and enrich the quality of life for the graduate, educators must understand that one of the consequences of a good education for persons from certain cultures may be alienation from that culture - a high price to pay for the educational experience.

By way of summary it should be stressed that we are all products of our respective cultures. All cultures have unique approaches to child rearing. All have differences in the values they prize most highly. All have variations in their use of language and its meaning. All approach education from different

perspectives. Crucial to success in the educational process is the effective communication of ideas. Communication takes many forms. Verbal and non-verbal modalities utilized are directly related to previous and current cultural, educational and interpersonal experiences. In this paper we have tried to identify some behavioral characteristics of different cultures, the educational problems that arise when cultural differences are combined with learning skill deficiencies and the challenge that faces us as educators when our student body is comprised of people with diversified cultural backgrounds, various levels of learning skills development and various communication styles. All of these variations can serve either as stumbling blocks or stepping stones. Our goal must be to use them as stepping stones. Through our collective commitment and effort, this goal can be achieved. Our students will be better served; they will experience more success; we will experience more satisfaction; and society will receive better health and nursing care.

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